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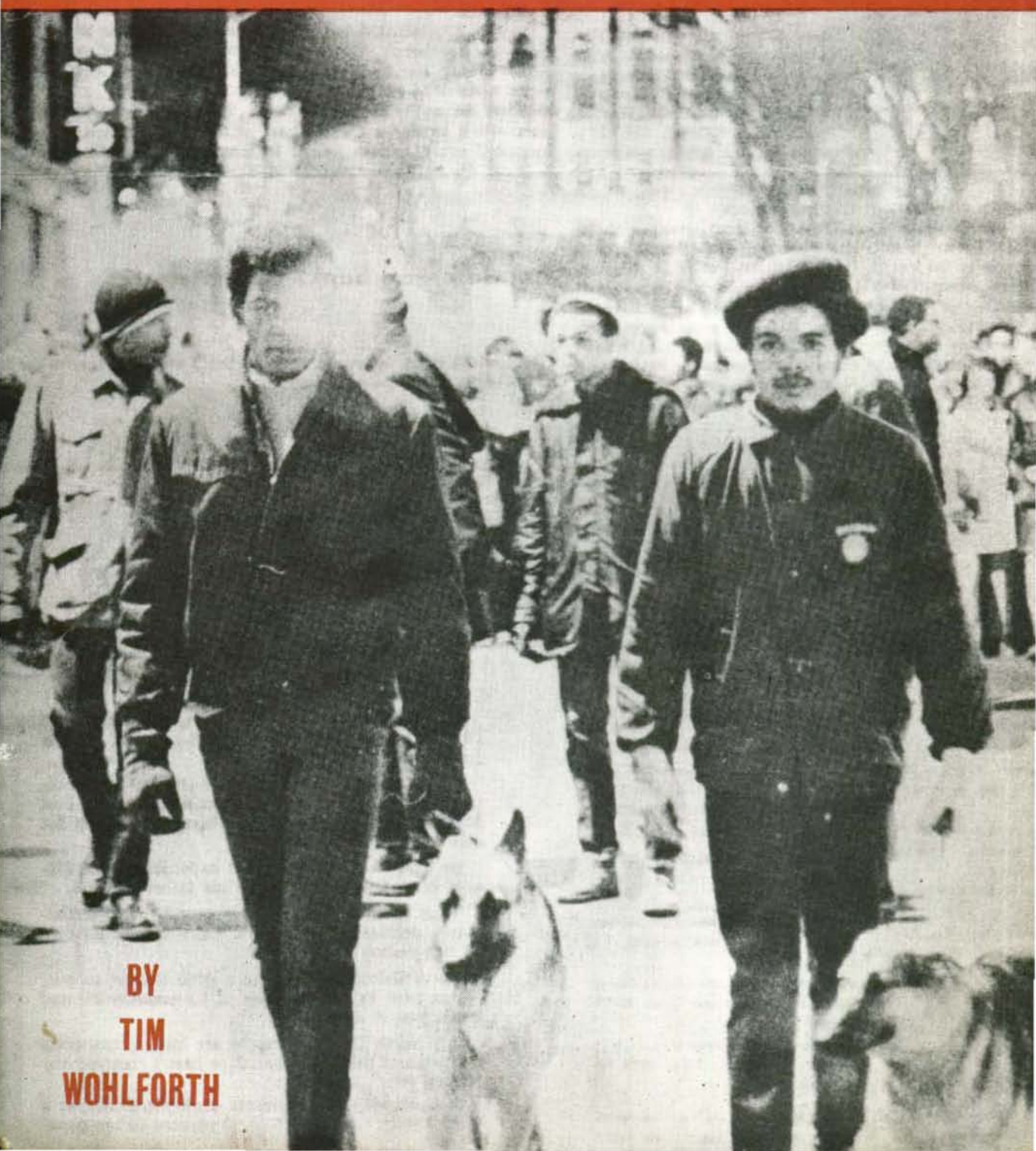
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# THE NEW NATIONALISM AND THE NEGRO STRUGGLE



BY  
TIM  
WOHLFORTH



## INTRODUCTION

IN THE recent period we have seen an outburst of a very peculiar kind of nationalism within many of the advanced capitalist countries of the world.

Belgium has been torn apart for several years now by a struggle between Flemish-speaking and French-speaking peoples with demands for federalism and separation being raised.

In Scotland and Wales, long united with England as Great Britain, separatist agitation is growing. In Ireland, conflicts between Protestant and Catholic Irish in Ulster, a feud which goes back to the 17th century, has suddenly and violently erupted.

In Canada, French Canadian separatism has become a central political issue in the country threatening to tear apart the very Canadian national state. Even de Gaulle, who has opportunistically encouraged French Canadian

separatism, now faces similar agitation in Brittany.

Finally, in Switzerland, which has existed for centuries as a multi-lingual bourgeois state with particularly tranquil relations among its linguistic groups, the French speaking population of the Jura region in a German speaking Canton has been agitating for separatism.

The growth of black nationalism among American Negroes must be seen as part of this same international trend.

An understanding of the causes for and the nature of this new form of nationalism internationally is indispensable to an understanding of black nationalism in the United States.

Wherever these trends have emerged the revisionists of the Socialist Workers' Party (SWP), its international co-thinkers, the Maoists and the Stalinists have

reacted in the same way.

Each particular nationalist agitation is seen in isolation from its international context and at the same time Lenin's position on the right of nations to self-determination is applied as an abstract schematic formula and used as an excuse to adapt to the particular national trend.

Here we have methodologically a combination of pragmatism and metaphysical formalism which leads inevitably to opportunism of the crudest sort.

What a Marxist approach to the national question requires is quite the opposite: to begin at all times from the point of view of the international struggle of the working class and at the same time to understand reality in all its concreteness—to place the particular nationalist movement within its proper historical evolution.

## 1

# LENINISM VERSUS REVISIONISM

A STUDY of the writings of Lenin on the national question will make clear that it is with this latter method that Lenin, basing himself on Marx, approached the question.

We look to Lenin, therefore, to deepen our understanding of the methodological approach to this question and certainly not to find some simple schematic formula to define 'nations' or to declare our attitude towards 'nationalism' as some sort of abstraction.

Even a very cursory study of Lenin will reveal that Lenin was at no time and under no conditions a 'partisan of nationalism' as the January 31 'Militant' describes him.

Particularly important among Lenin's many writings on this question are his article 'Critical Remarks on the National Question', 'The Right of Nations to Self-Determination', 'The

Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination (Theses)' and 'The Discussion of Self-Determination Summed Up'.

This material, written between 1914 and 1916, represents a mature development of his views, the result of a long struggle since 1903, and is the basis for the policies of the Bolshevik Party during and after the October Revolution.

These writings take the form of an integrally related polemic, first against Otto Bauer's theory of 'cultural-national autonomy' and then against Luxemburg's opposition to the right of self-determination of oppressed nations and finally a summary of the central lessons of both polemics in the form of theses.

Lenin's views were developed in a polemic against those like Bauer and the Bundists who adapted to the nationalism of

the oppressed nationalities as well as those whose formal schematic denial of the question of self-determination objectively bolsters the nationalism of an oppressor nation.

Lenin saw the demand of national self-determination as a bourgeois democratic demand, as part of the bourgeois revolution.

### National state

The demand is to be supported by the working class under conditions where it will mean the development of a national state within which the working class can advance its struggle against capitalism, removes national bickering and unites the working class of different nationalities into a common struggle against capitalism.

Like all bourgeois democratic demands, it is subordinate to the international struggle of the



working class, but at the same time is necessary to achieve this international unity.

Nationalism is therefore bourgeois nationalism and can be nothing else but bourgeois nationalism.

Lenin never claimed nationalism to be anything else and never supported nationalism of an oppressed or oppressor nation.

Thus the recent attacks by Tony Thomas and Gus Horowitz in the 'Militant' against Progressive Labour for daring to call nationalism 'bourgeois' have absolutely nothing to do with Marxism.

As Lenin put it:

'Working-class democracy counterposes to the nationalist wrangling of the various bourgeois parties over questions of language, etc., the demand for the unconditional unity and complete amalgamation of workers of all nationalities in all working-class organizations — trade unions, co-operatives, consumers' educational and all others—in contradistinction to any kind of 'bourgeois nationalism.'

For instance Tony Thomas states about Lenin's views:

'The nationalism of any oppressed nation,' he explains, 'has a general democratic content that is directed against oppression and it is that content we unconditionally support.'

Let us take this quote from Lenin, give it in its entirety and in its proper context and then we can see that Lenin had in mind the exact opposite of what Thomas attributes to him.

This is what Lenin really said:

'The bourgeois nationalism of any oppressed nation has a general democratic content that is directed against oppression, and it is this content that we unconditionally support.'

'At the same time we strictly distinguish it from the tendency towards national exclusiveness; we fight against the tendency of the Polish bourgeois to oppress the Jews, etc.'

On the next page he point blank states:

'We combat all nationalism and uphold the equality of the various nations.'

So what Thomas does is first remove the section of the quote which refers, not to nationalism as a classless generality, but 'bourgeois nationalism' (for Lenin could not consider nationalism as anything but bourgeois) and then rips the quote out of con-

text so as to obscure exactly what Lenin was stating.

He was not claiming to support nationalism as 'progressive', but rather the 'general democratic content that is directed against oppression.'

This content, as Lenin stated, can be summed up in one demand 'Support to the right of self-determination'.

He fought any tendency to support national movements in any way or any aspect of nationalism aside from this right. He stated on several occasions that the Bolshevik position on this right was 'negative' in the sense that we do not fight for the secession of a nation but uphold the right to secede.

Gus Horowitz then comes forward with an even more unbelievable statement, so much so that he must paraphrase Lenin since a quote even to be distorted cannot be found. 'Lenin explained', Horowitz informs us, 'that the nationalism of the oppressors is reactionary but the nationalism of the oppressed is progressive'.

### Consistent enemy

Lenin said nothing of the kind.

What he did say was:

'Insofar as the bourgeoisie of the oppressed nation fights the oppressor, we are always, in every case, and more strongly than anyone else, in favour, for

we are the staunchest and most consistent enemies of oppression. But insofar as the bourgeoisie of the oppressed nation stands for its own bourgeois nationalism, we stand against. We fight against privileges and violence of the oppressor nation, and do not in any way condone strivings for privileges on the part of the oppressed nation.'

Lenin found no difficulty in fighting absolutely and all the way for the right of self-determination of oppressed nations without making the slightest concession to the bourgeois nationalism of the oppressed nation.

Particularly important in this respect is Lenin's long struggle on the Jewish question against the Bund and his battle against the theories of cultural and national autonomy of Otto Bauer and the Austrian centrists.

It is particularly important that this whole struggle is completely ignored by Thomas and Horowitz.

Lenin's position was one of complete opposition to autonomy in 'cultural' matters, control of the schools, etc. which he held meant support for the bourgeois aspirations of the oppressed nationalities and led to the divisions not unity of the working class.

He repeated over and over that the only progressive aspect of the national question was the right of nations to self-determi-



Lenin took up struggle against Otto Bauer (left) and the Bundists



nation and that this right meant one thing only, the right to secede, to form an independent state.

To give the national question any more 'support' than this was in effect to ally oneself with the national bourgeoisie and to tie the working class of the particular nationality to its own bourgeoisie. We will return to this question when we deal with the Negro question directly for we will see that the only content of black nationalism is precisely the reactionary 'national-cultural autonomy' demand. (See 'The Negro, Nation and Marxist Theory' by Lucy St. John, December 16, 'Bulletin'.)

But Gus Horowitz proceeds differently: 'The essence of self-determination is the right of oppressed nationalities to decide for themselves what they want and need. Revolutionaries have the obligation of supporting this right, regardless of what they may think best.'

Horowitz states this in a section of his article where he waves indignantly over Progressive Labour's audacity in criticizing the 15 demands of the black students at San Francisco State.

The political meaning of this formula is, of course, abject subordination of the revolutionary party to whatever happens to be in the heads of the black nationalist leaders at the time. This formula is the rationale for the role of the SWP and 'Militant' in uncritically supporting everything and anything the black nationalists do.

The formula is, in essence, a result of a complete confusion of the question of self-determination with that of cultural-national autonomy and makes crystal clear why Lenin fought the latter trend so hard.

As Lenin says, self-determination is only a matter of the right to secede and he saw the task of the revolutionary party in this respect as 'largely a negative one.'

That is, the party does not tell an oppressed minority that it must secede—in fact under certain circumstances it might agitate for them not to secede. The principle involved is that the revolutionary party in the oppressor nation must uphold the right of the oppressed nation to secede.

In this sense and in this sense alone Horowitz is right. The revolutionary party does not decide this secession question for the

national minority.

But when this reasoning is applied to the programmatic demand of a national or any other minority it turns into its opposite. This is why Lenin warned that there is a 'limit the proletariat can go to in supporting nationalism, for beyond that begins the "positive" activity of the bourgeoisie striving to fortify nationalism.'

## No blank cheque

Never, never, never would Lenin or any Marxist for a single second conceive of granting to the national movement, which means granting to a bourgeois tendency, the right to determine its own policies free from the sharpest criticisms of the Marxists and certainly not to extend a blank cheque to such bourgeois nationalists to put forward whatever they wished and we in turn would support them.

Even the Bund and Otto Bauer would have recoiled from such crass opportunism and adaptation to the bourgeoisie.

An understanding of nationalism as an aspect of the bourgeois democratic revolution has fundamental implications which our 'Militant' pundits do not even begin to tackle, much less comprehend.

First of all it requires of Marxists that we view the national question in its concrete historical circumstances rather than abstracting out of history some general metaphysical notions. It was precisely the latter metaphysical method which led Luxemburg to write off the question of self-determination entirely.

This very same method leads the revisionists to raise the question of self-determination under every and all conditions and to utilize it as a way of adapting to bourgeois national movements.

Lenin devoted a whole section of his polemic against Luxemburg to the 'Historically Concrete Presentation of the Question'.

The categorical requirement of Marxist theory in investigating any social question is that it be examined within definite historical limits, and if it refers to a particular country (e.g. the national programme for a given country), that account be taken of the specific features distin-

guishing that country from others in the same historical epoch.'

This is Lenin's method.

Utilizing this method Lenin analyses three distinctly different kinds of countries which existed side by side in his day, each representing a different stage of historical development (see point 6 of his 'Theses').

The first are 'the advanced capitalist countries of Western Europe and the United States'. Here the bourgeois democratic revolution was completed long ago and Lenin saw no validity whatsoever to the right of self-determination of nations within such countries.

In these countries its only importance was the absolute necessity for the workers' movement to defend this right in the colonial sphere, especially where their own imperialist bourgeoisie was concerned. The second category includes 'Eastern Europe, Austria, the Balkans and particularly Russia'.

In these countries the bourgeois democratic revolution had only partially succeeded in creating multi-national states with one bourgeois national grouping dominating over other oppressed nationalities and many features of feudalism remaining.

It is within such a country, that the question of the right of self-determination has particular meaning, is in fact essential to bring about the unity of the working class of many nationalities, in a common struggle against the bourgeoisie.

The third grouping is, of course, the colonial and semi-colonial countries where the slogan is also of great importance, but here the struggle is against a foreign imperialist power.

Lenin emphasizes throughout his writings that the necessity for raising this demand for self-determination is always associated with a country in a state of backwardness which has either not passed through the bourgeois democratic revolution or where this revolution has only been partially successful. Thus his insistence on historical concreteness.

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IT IS precisely the fact that the bourgeois revolution has long been completed in Belgium, England, Canada and the United States which makes the current nationalist and semi-nationalist movements in these countries so completely reactionary and the demand for the right to self-determination absolutely out of place. A look at a few of these situations will make this absolutely clear and also what is, the real underlying cause of this new kind of nationalism.

First a look at Scottish nationalism (for a more detailed account see: 'Scottish Nationalism and Revisionism', by Ian McCalman, 'Fourth International', Winter, 1968-1969). The question of Scotland was settled definitely in the 18th century.

British capitalism required a larger geographical basis for its capital development than England alone so by the beginning of the 18th century important capital development occurred in the Lowland areas of Scotland in particular.

It was precisely this capital development which led to the closest collaboration and fusion of the Scottish and English bourgeoisies, resolving the old conflicts between Scotland and England and laying the economic basis for what is now Great Britain.

Thus the bourgeois democratic revolution was completed in England and Scotland a long, long time ago, though of course the Highland areas remained more primitive, much like areas of Appalachia in the United States.

This led to a very different evolution of Scotland from Ireland, where even to this day the country is subjugated to British imperialism and the partition of the country prevents its free development as a nation. Wales, on the other hand, evolved as did Scotland.

The current growth of nationalism in Scotland is in fact directly related to the development of capitalism in Scotland. It can only be understood by understanding the deep crisis of international capitalism which has had a particularly severe im-

pact on Great Britain.

Lowland Scotland, precisely because of its early capitalist development, has been particularly hit by the capitalist crisis, its industry being old and less competitive internationally.

This has led to growing unemployment and great pressure not only on the workers but sections of the petty bourgeoisie. In this respect it does not differ significantly from similar sections of England proper, such as the north-east.

So Scottish nationalism is essentially a movement of the petty bourgeoisie which seeks to save itself from the impact of the crisis by arguing for its particularly parochial and sectional interests.

This petty bourgeoisie seeks to advance itself at the expense of the rest of Great Britain and over the backs of the workers.

The workers, who feel most directly the impact of the crisis, are turned from the true cause of the crisis—capitalist rule—to nationalist attempts to see their hardships as resulting from English domination of the Scots.

Thus nationalism plays an extremely reactionary role of tying the Scottish workers closer to the capitalists and hiding the real causes of their difficulties.

The revisionist collaborators of the SWP in England, the Maoists and the Stalinists have all used the very same arguments as the SWP does in relation to the Negro question to support Scottish nationalism.

At the same time, growing from within Scottish nationalism are fascist tendencies who propose a military dictatorship in Scotland. And so nationalism becomes a screen for collaboration between revisionism and fascism.

### Inevitable result

This fascism is the absolutely inevitable result of nationalist tendencies within advanced countries during a period of crisis and shows most deeply the reactionary and petty-bourgeois nature of such nationalism.

When we turn to Ireland the extremely reactionary and dan-

gerous character of this new nationalism is manifest all the clearer. In Ireland there is a genuine national question involved. As long as Ireland remains partitioned the working class of Ireland remains divided and weakened.

The demand for the destruction of the partition and the creation of a real Irish nation is an absolutely indispensable part of the programme of Marxists not only in both Ulster and the Irish Republic, but in Great Britain as well.

But it is not this absolutely correct and supportable battle for Irish self-determination which is presently rocking Ireland. Instead we find Ulster torn asunder by a fratricidal struggle between the dominant Protestant and the minority Catholic sections of the population.

Again underlying this warfare is the deep economic crisis as industry in Belfast is as vulnerable as that in Glasgow.

But instead of a common fight against the capitalists we have this fratricidal religious war which pushes the Protestant workers in the direction of fascist Paisleyism and ties the Catholic workers even closer to reactionary clericalism.

But there is another aspect of this Irish struggle which is particularly important to our understanding. The present struggle centres around a 'Civil Rights Movement' made up of liberal and radical students with the participation of Catholic workers.

The movement has many of the characteristics of the early civil rights struggles in this country, in particular Martin Luther King's marches into white working class suburbs of Chicago in 1964.

By posing the issue as a 'civil rights' one this movement acts only to encourage the reactionary Paisleyism of the Protestant workers. It begins, as did King, with demonstrations to get concessions from the government on housing and other forms of discrimination against Catholic workers.

But it already shows signs of going over to the ghettoism of



current black nationalism, of an internal partition of the Catholic neighbourhoods within Protestant dominated Ulster.

What is really required in Ulster is a fight against capitalism within which will be posed the destruction of all forms of religious discrimination.

Only in this way can these divisions be broken down. These civil rights protests only solidify centuries-old antagonisms among the working class.

The French Canadian question poses many of the same questions. Here, too, Canada long ago went through the bourgeois revolution and emerged as an important imperialist country in its own right, despite the penetration of British and American capital in the country.

In no sense was or is Canada a backward country like Russia which maintained right up to the October Revolution important feudal vestiges in the government and on the land.

Canada is, however, a multilingual nation much like Switzerland and Belgium. To an internationalist this is all to the good as long as there are no privileges allowed to be connected to one language or the other and every concession is made to see that there is complete equality of languages.

### Language rights

This is the way Lenin approached the question of Switzerland. Thus Marxists must defend the language rights of the French Canadians.

But to support the current Canadian separatist movement is something quite different. This movement has absolutely nothing to do with the right of self-determination. Like the Scottish movement it is a completely petty-bourgeois movement and a reaction to the international crisis.

Quebec has been going through an extremely important industrial boom in the post-war period. As a result Quebec today is the most industrialized province in Canada outside of Ontario.

While it is still backward when compared to Ontario and wage levels lower, it stands way ahead of the English-speaking Maritime provinces with their deep poverty, decaying agriculture, and stagnant economics.

The real roots of French Canadian nationalism lies in the slowing of the boom, so depen-



In Ireland the new nationalism is reflected in the reactionary developments of Paisleyism.

dent as it was on foreign—largely American—capital of the past few years. As a result unemployment has increased and the petty bourgeoisie, limited in moving to other provinces because of knowing only one language, has been particularly squeezed.

At the same time the French Canadian working class has been involved in fundamental union struggles which have threatened capitalism throughout Canada. When we add to this the general tendency throughout Canada toward deepened sectional rivalries (this has been expressed in British Columbia as well as the Maritimes) we get a picture of centrifugal tendencies within Canada coming to the surface as various regions vie with each other for a shrinking amount of new capital mostly from the US.

Marxists, as Lenin pointed out, have no interest whatsoever in federalism or confederation. We seek not the decentralizing of the centralized state, but the conquering of that state by the working class and its withering away and replacement by world socialism. So tendencies towards fracturing a country like Canada are reactionary in character and can receive no support from Marxists. We can make no concessions whatsoever to French Canadian nationalism.

We are not like the ISA,

Canadian supporters of the SWP, who support unconditionally the 'self-determination of French Canada' and thus adapt completely to French Canadian petty-bourgeois tendencies.

### Give no quarter

At the same time we will give no quarter to the 'strivings for privileges' of the French Canadian nationalists. Most recent example of this was their insistence that Italian immigrants in Montreal be forced to educate their children in French, even though these immigrants preferred English.

Thus these separatists want to deny the freedom of choice of language to the Italians which they themselves fight for correctly in predominantly English-speaking part of Canada.

We stand for the complete unity of the Canadian working class, despite language differences, in a common struggle against capital. Further we urge the closest collaboration of Canadian and American workers to destroy capitalism on the North American continent and to pave the way for the fullest socialist development of all the people of North America.

We could add more on Welsh nationalism, the Breton question and Walloon-Flemish controversy



(see 'A New Party? Some Lessons For Belgian Labour', by Peter Arnold for an account of Ernest Mandel's complete capitulation to Walloon federalism) but the point is clear. The question of self-determination of nations is not applicable under every and all circumstances.

No Marxist formula is an excuse for avoiding concreteness—the concrete analysis of a particular phenomenon within its particular historical circumstances.

This demand is part of the

general bourgeois democratic programme for countries where the bourgeois-democratic revolution has not been completed.

When applied to advanced imperialist countries this demand, rather than bringing the class together in a common battle against capitalism, fractures the working class, subordinates sections of it to petty-bourgeoisie movements and fosters fascistic tendencies.

Finally, where such a demand is correct it means one thing and one thing only—the declaration of the right of a nation to

secede. It does not mean support to nationalism or national movements of either oppressed or oppressor nations.

It does not mean support of any sort of 'cultural autonomy', 'community control', and any of the narrow and reactionary ideology of 'ghettoism'. 'The slogan of national culture is a bourgeois (and often a black hundred and clerical) fraud', Lenin stated. 'Our slogan is: the international culture of democracy and of the world working-class movement.'

## 3

# ARE NEGROES A NATION?

THE ONLY WAY the question of the American Negro can be understood is within the kind of international framework discussed in the first part of this article and with a completely scientific, objectively Marxist, concretely historical analysis.

The writings of all the revisionists on this question are completely pragmatic, sociological, psychological—in fact any and every method is used but Marxism.

The position of the Young Socialist Alliance and Socialist Workers' Party on this question is absolutely clear. Tony Thomas' article in the recent 'Militant' speaks of 'support to self-determination of the black nation'.

Gus Horowitz is only a slight degree more careful with his talk of 'a multi-class national minority', and that 'black people were nationally oppressed'. Both writers base themselves on the YSA resolution 'On the Revolutionary Struggle of Black America for Self-Determination'.

This is the most remarkable document to be produced by self-styled Marxists in the history of the movement.

It states that 'the job of black revolutionary socialists is to Afro-Americanize Marxism' by combining 'the traditions of Martin Delaney, Nat Turner, Marcus Garvey, and Malcolm X with the traditions of Marx, Lenin, Trotsky and Cannon . . .'. Its position on the national question is absolutely clear: Black people make up what is known as an

intra-colonized nation.'

So it is the position of the SWP and YSA today that the Negro constitutes an oppressed nation to whom the slogan of the right of self-determination correctly applies.

Such a statement is of considerable importance for the whole struggle for socialism in the United States and thus for the whole international struggle. It requires a serious Marxist analysis, a concrete historical study of the specific evolution of the Negro people within the United States as it relates to the economic development of the United States within world capitalism.

This is not supplied by the YSA and SWP. For all their harping on the importance of 'facts' their resolution is as empty of concrete historical analysis as it is full of all sorts of psychological and sociological rubbish stolen from the universities about 'identity' and 'African heritage' and 'spiritual armament'.

## 'Black Belt theory'

The approach of the Communist Party to this question must also be considered because their black belt theory, while schematic and absurd, represented at least a serious attempt at making a case for the Negro being a nation.

As we have noted, the question of the right of self-determination has only one content, only one meaning—the right of

a nation to secede or if an external colony the right to break from imperialist domination.

It has no other content. It does not mean the right for national groups sprinkled throughout cities to have autonomy in 'cultural' matters.

It certainly never meant support for bourgeois nationalism in any way. So if the Negro is a nation to which this slogan applies this means it must have a 'homeland', a region where it has developed its independent national culture and where a national bourgeoisie has arisen.

It means then that the United States never completed its bourgeois democratic revolution and like Russia is a multi-national state with an oppressed nation within it.

The Communist Party attempted to make a case for the Negro as a nation by delineating the counties in the South where the Negro was in a majority as a 'black belt'.

This black belt was seen as dominated by the archaic sharecropper plantation economy, a real 'intra-colonized nation'.

While the CP could not fail to note the wide dispersion of Negroes throughout the country as a whole they claimed that the majority still lived in this 'homeland' and the others sought to someday return to their Black Ukraine.

If this position of the CP, which they have consistently shelved recently as even the most ardent black nationalist is not the least bit interested in re-



turning to his 'homeland', is historically correct, then the slogan of self-determination has at least some semblance of reality to it.

## American Civil War

This whole question was in reality settled as a result of the American Civil War. The development of industrial capitalism in the North made the continuation of slavery more and more intolerable.

Above all the Northern capitalists could not submit to a breaking up the country through a confederation and the possibility of the extension of slavery into the new states of the West.

Rather they needed to extend capitalism into the South as well as the West. The North-East region was too limited to support the development of capitalism just as England was a century earlier in relation to Scotland and Wales.

Concern for the plight of the slaves was the least concern of the Northern capitalists, but all the same, as Marx and Engels pointed out, the struggle of the North against the South was historically progressive and necessary if the working class was to develop in the United States.

After the victorious conclusion of the war the main question shaking American politics was the future of the South. Some considered transforming the South into an internal colony, perhaps a black-dominated one and openly supported the black reconstruction movement.

But the dominant capitalist interests had something else in mind. They wanted peace with the old ruling class of the South to pave the way for fusion with this class much as the English did with the Scottish bourgeoisie and to open capital development of the region.

Of course, as we shall see, they carried through this fusion in a very reactionary way. One reason for this solidarity with

their old enemy was fear of the new enemy—the danger of a combined movement of Negro and white small farmers with the industrial workers of the North which took an early form in the Populist movement.

So reconstruction was scuttled and the old ruling classes continued to hold on to a semblance of their old plantation system through share-cropping which tied the rural Negro to the land almost as securely as slavery.

It is from this period that the race system as such can be dated, with all the Jim Crow laws of the South.

The race prejudices were maintained to hold the Negro down as a source of cheap labour, to keep the working class divided and thus to hold the class down as a whole North and South.

But despite the partial survival of the old plantation culture industrial development flourished in the East and Mid-West and started in the South.

The North's victory in the Civil War and the destruction of the South's special regionalism laid the basis for the fantastic growth of capital in the period of the Robber Barons, which made it possible for the United States to emerge from World War I as the dominant imperialist nation of the world.

## Negro immigration

This industrial development was accompanied by a tendency of Negro immigration from the rural South to the urban North and later the urban South.

At the same time the plantation economy went into decay. By the 1930s mechanization was introduced into cotton farming leading to the almost total destruction of the share-cropper system and increased Negro migration out of the 'black belt'.

Many Negroes, however, were allowed to remain in their cabins rent free so that a ready and cheap labour supply would be available for cotton weeding

which still had to be done by hand. Now modern science has abolished this task as well, as hundreds of thousands of Negro families of the old South are being forced out of their homes.

Crop restrictions in both cotton and tobacco also have contributed to this process.

Today there is little left of the old black belt and the plantation economy upon which it rested. Even by 1950 close to a majority of the Negroes in America lived in the North and a majority of those who lived in the South lived in cities.

Industrial development has made the South, while not as industrialized as the Maine to Virginia Atlantic belt and the Great Lakes region, more industrialized than Appalachia, the Mountain States and most of the Mid-West plains area.

The American Civil War marked the completion of the American bourgeois democratic revolution and the emergence of a strong nation state with a powerful and integrated national economy.

Any possibility of a Negro nation died with the destruction of reconstruction, the attrition of the plantation economy and the migration of the Negro and his at least partial integration into the American working class economically.

This is why the Negro is not today in any sense whatsoever a nation or a national minority.

In fact this objective reality is reflected in the ideology of the Negro nationalists themselves. Outside of its more exotic fringes the black nationalists do not demand repatriation to Africa, or return to the South, or any clear secessionist demand.

Rather, the very objective conditions of the Negro people restrict their nationalism exclusively to 'cultural nationalist' slogans such as black control of the black communities or black control of the schools, etc.

# 4

## GROWTH OF BLACK NATIONALISM

WHEREIN then lies the objective causes for this recent outburst of black nationalism in the United States? If seen in its in-

ternational context this becomes extremely clear.

Like Scottish nationalism, French-Canadian nationalism and

Protestant-Catholic feuding in Ireland, it is a reflection of the deepening crisis of world capitalism.



A brief look at the evolution of the Negro movement since the 1954 Supreme Court Decision will make this patently clear.

From the Montgomery bus boycott through to the marches into Cicero the Negro struggle was primarily a reform struggle. Mass demonstrations were held in order to force concessions from the government.

This was the policy of both King and Student Non-violent Co-ordinating Committee (SNCC). But the result of all the demonstrating was, despite the passage of all kinds of laws, no real change in either the economic lot of the Negro masses or racial discrimination in the country.

Civil rights proved the bankruptcy of capitalism which, entering into a new period of crisis and decline, was incapable of bettering the lot of the Negro masses or wiping out race discrimination, prejudice and ghetto existence.

With reformism exposed there was no other road open to the Negro masses than a revolutionary struggle against capitalism itself. This required the building of a revolutionary working-class leadership not only of the Negro masses, but of the class as a whole.

It was precisely at this point, when the need for revolutionary class struggle was posed, that black nationalism enters the scene.

The importance of black nationalism lies precisely in its turning away of the Negro masses from a struggle which posed the end of capitalism itself to a racist battle for one or another form of cultural autonomy.

It must be understood that the crisis which has ended any hope for a bourgeois reform solution of the Negro question is international in scope.

As we have noted, the victory of the North in the Civil War paved the way for the emergence of the United States as the dominant world imperialist power. But this has occurred within the general historical period of imperialist decay.

### Period of crisis

This means first of all that the rise of the United States has meant the decline of Europe, Great Britain in particular. Secondly it has meant that United States hegemony, rather than being accompanied by a period of relative peace and international stability, is accompanied by a period of crisis, war and revolution.

This new explosive situation internationally places the Negro struggle in an entirely different context.

It has internationalized it so that the fate of the Negro people has become deeply intertwined with the fate of the world working class. In particular, the developing revolutionary situation in Europe.

Precisely at this moment enters black nationalism with its revisionist supporters seeking to separate out the Negro not only from the rest of the working class in the United States but at the same time from the international class struggle.

It will soon be shown that the impact of the revolutionary

struggles in Europe, attacks on the working class as whole within the United States, and the conscious struggles of Marxists against black nationalism will transform the very surface nature of the current racist polarization of American politics.

Acceptance of black nationalism is thus deeply connected with a pragmatic retreat on the part of the revisionists from an international outlook and an acceptance, not of the crisis of international capital and the struggle of classes, but the permanence of capitalism and its race divisions.

The black-nationalist struggle by its very ideological character accepted the race divisions in America, the black ghettos, the poverty.

Its goal is to seek control over the ghetto rather than its abolition, to preach acceptance of racism and racial pride rather than the abolition of the race system and class solidarity.

Under black nationalism not even reforms are any longer sought. A whole struggle is waged in New York City for community control of the schools without a single demand raised against the bourgeois state for the betterment of the school system, the abolition of the slums, and the like.

Black nationalism is petty bourgeois not only because its ideology turns the Negro masses away from class confrontation and internationalism, from a fight against capitalism itself, but because the petty-bourgeois strata of the Negroes are the only ones to benefit in the slightest from black-nationalist demands.

## 5

## BLACK ANTI-SEMITISM

NOW WE come to the question of black anti-Semitism. The 'Militant' has recently run a series of articles by Elizabeth Barnes in defence of black anti-Semitism, or shall we say 'explaining' it.

In addition George Novack has written a long discussion review of Deutscher's book 'The Non-Jewish Jew', the heart of which is a similar 'explanation' of black anti-Semitism.

Both Barnes and Novack cor-

rectly attack the hypocrisy of the campaign of New York City officials against racism among Negroes both of the anti-Semitic and anti-white kind when they in fact defend a white racist system in the country as a whole.

'To equate anti-white feelings of black people with the racism of their oppressors is the worst kind of hypocrisy'. So true.

But the question is not whether we equate one with the other but whether the existence of white

racism can be used to excuse a racist and anti-Semitic reaction among Negroes.

And excuse is exactly what the SWP then proceeds to do.

'It is wrong to confuse Jews as a people with the real perpetrators of racism in this country', Barnes correctly states. 'But', [ah, that three letter word which is so often used to deny everything that precedes it] 'the Jewish people—who have every legitimate right to be concerned



about genuine anti-Semitism or persecution—must think out the consequences of the present situation.

'Consider this single fact', Barnes goes on, 'a majority of the pupils in New York's public schools are black or Puerto Rican.'

'But the majority of the teachers are Jewish.'

### 'Partisan of freedom'

'The only effective way anti-Jewish prejudice can be effectively combatted in such a situation is if the Jewish community demonstrates that it is a genuine partisan of freedom and justice for all and not simply concerned with preserving jobs or privileges at the expense of the black and Puerto Rican people who are seeking nothing more than their rights.'

Well, Elizabeth Barnes, consider this single fact. A very large portion of small business in Germany between the two wars was in the hands of Jews.

Thus, we can assume, you would feel the only way to have have countered anti-Jewish prejudice among the non-Jewish Germans would be to have the Jews abandon their business to non-Jews.

And consider one more single fact. The bulk of small business and a large portion of government jobs in Kenya was until recently in Indian hands.

Thus the way to remove anti-Indian prejudices among the Africans would be for the Indians to give up their jobs.

And a large portion of petty trade in Indonesia used to be in the hands of Chinese. . . . And finally Nigeria, where petty trade, teaching and government jobs throughout the nation were largely in the hands of Ibos.

If only the Ibos had been genuine partisans of freedom and justice rather than being simply concerned with preserving jobs and privileges then there would not have been the massacres, the war, etc.

What this shows is once the monstrous method of thinking in national and race terms creeps into one's outlook it takes total control and nothing, nothing can be seen in anything but racial terms.



Leslie Campbell (above) a teacher in the Ocean Hill-Brownsville district who read an anti-Semitic poem by one of his 15-year-old students over the local radio.

### Expose as fraud

We would propose to Barnes that an effective way to counter anti-Semitism is to fight it tooth and nail, give it no quarter whatsoever wherever it rears its head and expose it mercilessly as the fraud it is and as an opening wedge everywhere for fascism.

We fight anti-Semitism because it destroys working-class consciousness and hides the class realities of capitalist society and not from some sort of liberal moral position.

Once you start with the 'fact' that the majority of teachers are Jewish you have conceded everything to the anti-Semites, just as if you start in Nigeria with the 'fact' that the majority of petty trade is in Ibo hands you concede everything to tribalism.

We start with another fact—that we live in capitalist society; that teachers are workers who have a right to union protection; that the oppression of the blacks is the responsibility of capitalist society and will exist as long as capitalism exists and is not the responsibility of Jews as Jews; that as long as Negroes see their enemy as the Jew and not the capitalist class, their progressive rebellion against racial discrimination and class oppression will be turned in a reactionary direction; that we have the responsibility to point this out without giving any quarter to anti-Negro racism wherever it exists—among Jews, workers, Puerto Ricans or what have you.

Now what about the fact that there are few Negroes teaching in New York City's public schools when contrasted to the large percentage of Negroes attending the schools.

Barnes proposes to solve this problem by asking Jewish teachers to give up their 'jobs or privileges' so that Negroes can teach. Not only does posing the question this way pit Negro worker against Jewish worker, but the underlying assumption is an acceptance of capitalist society as unchangeable.

### More teachers

Barnes sees no way for Negroes to find jobs as teachers other than taking them for Jews.



It never seems to occur to her that the New York City school system is falling apart at the seams, the classes are getting bigger, and there is a tremendous need for more teachers.

Should not the teachers, the Negro masses and the workers of the city as a whole unite in a common struggle to expand the school system, to produce more job openings for teachers, funds to train Negroes to become teachers, and a better education for all working-class youth?

Once one starts from a nationalist and racist perspective, various racial and other minority groups fight each other for existing jobs instead of uniting to fight the capitalists for jobs for all.

This is why nationalism is so inherently reactionary under the current economic crisis.

Finally we come across the following statement in one of Barnes' articles:

'For the Lindsay Administration and the white Anglo rulers of New York City who cannot grant self-determination for black people—the "backlash" is a part of their well-tested strategy of divide and rule.' This is no quote in the 'Militant' from a black nationalist but a 'Militant' writer speaking for herself.

## Racist ideology

It seems for Barnes New York City is not dominated by the capitalist class but by 'white Anglo rulers'. The white working class is blocked with the ruling class and 'whiteness', not capitalism, is seen as oppressing the Negro people.

Such is the racist ideology of these purported 'Marxists'!

Now we must turn to Novack's contribution to this question. He draws a parallel between Jewish-Negro relations in the US, and the Arab-Israel situation. 'At the present time there is a deadly symmetry between the attitude of the Israelis toward the Arabs and that of the American Jews toward the Afro-Americans and their liberation struggle. . . . Furthermore, the upper and middle ranges of American Jewry, comfortably ensconced in bourgeois America, some of them bankers, landlords, big and little businessmen, participate in the system of oppressing and ex-

ploiting the black masses, just as the Zionists have become the oppressors of the Palestinian Arabs.

'Jewish teachers in New York, reluctant to give up their small privileges, resist Afro-American demands for control of the schools in their communities.'

What this proves is that Novack is no longer capable of understanding anything in the Middle-East or the United States in class, Marxist, scientific terms.

Everything everywhere is seen in racial national terms and therefore nowhere can a socialist struggle be waged with this outlook.

In the first place the question in the Middle-East is not 'the attitude of the Israelis towards the Arabs' but rather the existence of the bourgeois state of Israel, conceived of as exclusively Jewish, and imposed upon the Arab peoples by the imperialists.

We do not blame the Israeli workers for this state of affairs but their capitalist rulers and the world imperialists. This understanding in no way leads to support in any form of the oppression of the Arab nation.

## Unity in struggle

We stand for the self-determination of the Arab peoples and defend the Arabs against the imperialist-inspired Israeli aggression. At the same time we seek to bring about a unity in struggle of the Jewish and Arab workers against their own bourgeoisie.

This requires particularly of the Jewish workers an absolutely unqualified statement of the right of self-determination for the Arab peoples including a settlement of the Arab refugee problem to the satisfaction of the refugees.

Now to the extent that Arab nationalists attribute the oppression of the Arab peoples not to Israel as a bourgeois state and the imperialists but to Jews as Jews and foster anti-Semitism we do not simply write 'explanations' of this but fight such views which can only hold back the workers' struggle in that area and unite the Arab workers with their own bourgeoisie.

Then we have all this nonsense about the Jews participating in the system of oppressing

and exploiting the black masses' Now the system which oppresses and exploits the black masses in the United States is the capitalist system.

There are a number of Jewish capitalists as well as Protestant ones and Catholic ones and even a few black ones.

We fight capitalists as capitalists and not capitalists as Jews. We certainly are not foolish enough to address the Jews as a 'people' suggesting that they withdraw their members who are capitalists from the exploiting process.

That is absurd.

We fight capitalists regardless of nationality, colour or religion and we fight for the unity of the working class despite national, racial and religious differences.

Novack accepts the way the world 'appears' to nationalists whether in the Middle East or the United States.

He then, as a liberal moralist, urges the Jews to change the appearance of things rather than exposing this appearance and fighting to change the essence of things, fighting for the socialist revolution.

## Wallace campaign

Does a fight against the racialism of an oppressed group in any way mean concessions to the dominant racism in the country? This is only the case when attacks on the racism or 'extremism' of the Negroes is used as an excuse not to fight white racism.

This is certainly the case with Mayor Lindsay and also with Shanker of the UFT. But the truth is once one makes any concession to racism, even in the form of the racism of the black nationals, one is actually paralysed in the fight against white chauvinism.

The recent Wallace campaign illustrates this perfectly.

Throughout the entire autumn period the Workers' League campaigned day in and day out against the Wallaceite racist poison fighting in the unions for the unions to recognize the danger in this racism to the whole working class and to mobilize the working class to crush this front-man for the fascists.



We did this not only in the 'Bulletin', which we took not only into Negro areas but to white workers as well, but we issued leaflet after leaflet in the unions and sought to raise the issue from the floor of union meetings.

This was not true of the 'Militant'. First the paper completely ignored the Wallace issue and later ran a few commentary articles on the inside of the paper.

In this the SWP was only following the lead of the black nationalists whose ideology led them to actually welcome Wallace.

The position of the black nationalists was that America as a whole is simply a white racist society and all whites are therefore racists and the enemy of the Negro.

### 'Honest' racism

The only difference they saw between Wallace and anyone else was that he was 'honest' about his racism.

This led some black nationalists to actually urge a vote for Wallace either on the grounds that Wallace in power would bring things to a head or actually agreeing with his aim of dividing America permanently on race grounds.

We found in our fight against Wallace a real cleavage between black workers and the petty-bourgeois nationalists. The latter

reacted hostilely to our campaign while black workers welcomed it.

The position of these black nationalists is much like that of the German Communist Party to fascism. The CP claimed that there was 'no difference' between Hitler and the Social Democrats and even talked of 'first Hitler then us'.

But as it worked out first there was Hitler and then—the Communist workers were in jail.

While it is true that racism pervades American life it does not flow from that that all whites are racists or that there is no distinction between a movement which bases itself on racism and the traditional bourgeois political parties in America.

We recognized this and as a result we were able to launch an effective campaign against an extremely virulent form of racism.

The SWP did not and capitulated to racism, accepted the existence of the racism of many white American workers as an unchangeable fact, utilized this existent racism as an excuse not to fight racism and to continue in its path of ignoring the struggles of American workers.

Racism can only be fought by refusing to accept its existence as permanent instead of accepting race divisions by asking for black control of black ghettos.

Our position is one of complete and absolute opposition to every form of racial discrimination.

### Negro ghettos

Negroes are forced to live in ghettos. We do not accept this compulsion but fight for the right of Negroes to live where they choose, to have housing of the same calibre as the people as a whole, schools as good, job opportunities as good, etc.

It is precisely our principled opposition to separatism which has made it possible for us to fight white racism within the working class on a class basis.

It is precisely the SWP's support to black nationalism which paralysed it in fighting white racism and forces it to treat racism in a non-class moralistic way.

This outlook in actuality reflects an acceptance not only of racism as a permanent feature of capitalism but capitalism as permanent as well.

In 1923 Leon Trotsky wrote a letter to the American Negro communist McKay in which he urged the importance of carrying on work among the Negro people. 'Needless to say', he stated, 'the work is not to be carried on in a spirit of Negro chauvinism, which would then merely form a counterpart of white chauvinism—but in a spirit of solidarity of all exploited without consideration of colour'.

This is one position of Trotsky's you will never find mentioned in the pages of the 'Militant'. Its spirit, however, fills the pages of the 'Bulletin'.

## 6

# THE FIGHT AGAINST RACISM

WE HAVE MADE quite clear what the Negro question is not—it is not a national question and any confusion of this question leads to divisions in the working class and defeat for the workers as a whole and the Negro people—but the question still remains as to what the Negro question is and flowing from that how the Negro struggle can advance itself.

It is the pat formula of the SWP that anyone who refuses to see the Negro question as a national question is thereby falling into the trap of the old Debsian socialists.

Debs and the early socialists refused to raise any demands related to the Negro, claiming that the working class was what counted and the triumph of the working class would take care of the Negro's problems.

In actuality, despite Debs' own wishes on the matter, this formula became a cover for a tremendous amount of white chauvinism that existed within American labour at the time.

In particular, sections of the Socialist Party actually agitated to bar Chinese immigrants on racist grounds and some expressed similar hostility towards

blacks.

The task for Marxists as we see it is not to deny the existence of a Negro question and see no role for demands related to this question in the general programme of the workers party.

### Minorities

It is rather to define, as Lenin did in his programme for actual national minorities, the limits we go in our demands related to the Negro question, limits which if surpassed in actuality bolster the bourgeoisie and thus defeat the Negroes as well as the work-



ers as a whole.

In this way we can see how demands related to the Negro properly fit into the general programme of the American working class as part of the international programme of the world working class.

A look at the position of Progressive Labour will help clarify this point.

Progressive Labour has developed a position which on the one hand attacks black nationalism as reactionary but on the other hand concedes everything to black nationalism through the back door.

In this respect it is similar to the Jewish Bund in Russian which attacked Zionism but insisted that there was a 'special character' to the Jew and thus the need for a separate Jewish workers' organization, cultural autonomy for the Jew, etc.

The February issue of Progressive Labour magazine makes this clear in three inter-related documents.

'Programme for Black Liberation', 'Black Workers: Key Revolutionary Force', and 'SDS

The Progressive Labour Party offers three pages of statistics to prove that Negroes are 'super-exploited' and thus suffer a 'special oppression' in order to rationalize their support for the black nationalist movement.

## NC Resolution on Racism

### PL's position

In essence PL's position is as follows: (1) Nationalism is bourgeois and reactionary; (2) but 95 per cent of blacks are workers; (3) not only are they workers but they are victims of 'super-exploitation' and thus suffer a 'special oppression'; (4) because of this the black-nationalist movement is 'national in form and working class in content'; (5) the task of revolutionaries, white workers and student is to 'fight racism' by supporting critically these 'national in form but working class in content' movements like black caucuses in unions, Third World student battles on the university campuses, the battle for community control against the teachers union in New York (though it opposes community control, as reactionary) etc.

So in practice Progressive Labour ends up with the same policy as the SWP, except that it maintains its 'criticisms' of the black nationalist programme.

First we must dispense with the 'national in form and working class in content' metaphysics.

The particularly reactionary aspects of black nationalism are strengthened precisely by the unity of form and content in the black nationalist movement.

The content of any movement is not the class origins of its participants but its programme. Otherwise we could claim that the Democratic Party in Michigan is bourgeois in form and working class in content as it is based on a bourgeois programme, but most of the voters and participants in the party are working class.

The content of black 'nationalism' is its bourgeois nationalist programme. The form which expressed this content is the organization of blacks as blacks.

### Metaphysical

Progressive Labour makes this metaphysical distinction between content and form so that it can both criticize nationalism but support the nationalist move-





ment.

More important, even, is Progressive Labour's assertion that since the Negro people are overwhelmingly working class in composition 'the essence of black liberation is working-class liberation' and the related thesis of the super-exploited special oppression of the Negro people.

While it is true that the essence of black liberation is working-class liberation this is not simply because Negroes are primarily workers.

There are Negroes of all classes and they all face discrimination and racism in some form or other. This fact cannot be simply dismissed by pointing to the preponderance of workers among the Negro people.

Further, to do so slights the very important role the Negro middle class plays in the black nationalist movement.

This is particularly true on the university campus for while black students may come largely from working-class and lower-middle-class homes their objective in going to college is to enter middle-class occupations and this objective has had a great deal to do with the kind of demands raised by these black-nationalist students.

Progressive Labour holds that Negroes represent a strata of the population paid less than the general average for the working class as a whole.

Through the mechanism of racism the ruling class is thus able to abstract super-profits from these lower paid black workers. This lays the economic foundation for the Negroes' 'special oppression'.

PL backs up this theory with three pages of statistical charts. What the charts show is that Negroes are on the average paid less than white workers, make up a larger proportion of workers in low paid industries, live in poorer housing, go to worse schools, die sooner, make up a larger section of the unemployed, etc.

In all these cases the Negroes' share of poverty conditions is way out of proportion to its percentage of the work force—in some cases as much as double.

## Super-exploitation

At the same time PL notes

that Negroes make up some 30 per cent of all auto workers, 25 per cent of steelworkers, and similarly large percentages of other basic industry—out of proportion to its 11 per cent of the population.

Super-exploitation, that is paying some workers less than the general average wage, does exist in the United States and its existence is at least partly justified through racism.

Negroes as well as other minority groups share disproportionately in this category. Further, the existence of race divisions within the working class has helped keep wages down for white workers as well, particularly in the South.

However it does not follow from this that the Negro as a whole represents a super-exploited grouping or caste in American society.

While a case could be made for this a century ago when Negroes were still tied to the cotton and tobacco plantation economies it does not hold water today.

In every category of low pay and poverty at least two-thirds of the workers in this category are white.

In addition, as PL's own statistics reveal, perhaps a million or more Negro workers are in unionized basic industry and thus are not super-exploited but exploited as are all other workers.

The importance of raising this point is that it makes clear that programmatically the workers' movement cannot raise separate economic demands for Negro workers only.

## Majority

We cannot, for instance, demand a 100-dollar weekly wage for Negro workers only ignoring the fact that the majority of workers earning under 100 dollars a week are white.

Whether one deals with unemployment, housing, schools, low paid jobs, or what have you—in every such category there are white as well as Negro workers facing the same problems and requiring the same programmatic fight.

All the PL's statistics prove is that more Negroes are super-exploited than whites propor-

tional to the number of Negroes in the work force.

Nothing more can be gained from these statistical averages. But PL utilizes these statistics to come to very different conclusions.

It concludes that the Negroes face a 'special' oppression in an economic sense that white workers do not face. Thus it is correct for Negro workers to organize separately from white workers in order to push for these special demands.

This leads it to support black caucuses in the unions. As far as the black-nationalist movement is concerned it accepts the need for a separate Negro liberation movement to push for these separate demands to counter the special oppression.

Thus it objects not to the form of the black struggle—its separateness—but to its content—its black-nationalist programme. Thus we see in another way the confusion it creates with its slogan 'nationalist' in form and working class in content.

In actuality it seeks to accept the real form and reject the real content of this movement. And this it cannot do for form and content are a unity in the black struggle.

So its support for the independent form of the black struggle leads it to adapt to its nationalist content.

## Reactionary

This leads it to adopt what is in reality a very reactionary demand—the demand, not for equality, but for preferential treatment of Negroes.

This takes two forms in its immediate programme—the demand for preferential hiring of Negroes and preferential advancement of Negroes in industry and the demand for preferential admissions of Negroes to universities.

The concept behind these demands—which by the way originate in bourgeois university and foundations studies and have been pushed by the government agencies for some time now—is that since the Negro has suffered a special oppression for centuries for the Negro to achieve real equality today he needs an edge to counteract this oppression.



However, the problem is that the white worker—for whose job the Negro is to be given the preference—is not responsible for the past and present oppression of the Negro but it is these white workers who are asked to make the sacrifice.

Such a programme can only be justified on two grounds (1) the acceptance of the presently available number of jobs and promotion possibilities as sacred and unchangeable, that is the acceptance of capitalism, and (2) a theory that Negro oppression is the result of the whites as such, not the capitalist system.

### Deepen racism

Needless to say such preferential demands only deepen racism among white workers and few workers can be dissuaded from this with moralistic 'fight racism' campaigns.

The Wallaceites tell the white worker that the Negro threatens to take his job away and the radicals come along and agree with the Wallaceites, urging the white worker to 'fight racism' by giving up his job or promotion to aid the Negro.

What is lacking completely, as we pointed out in the teachers question, is a common struggle against capitalism to demand more jobs, more promotions, more training programmes for all workers regardless of race so that the advancement of the Negro will not mean the unemployment or demotion of a white worker.

Only this kind of struggle can unite the working class as a whole in a battle to bring socialist consciousness to the class.

This is an extremely vital issue today when the world capitalist crisis means increased unemployment in the United States making the fight for jobs take on a transitional character, raising the question of power—of socialism or capitalism.

### Abstracted

Much the same can be said about preferential admissions policies in the university. The need is not for unlimited admissions of 'Third World students' but a free university education for all working-class youth.

Progressive Labour, like the SWP and all other so-called radical groups in the United States, approaches the Negro question completely abstracted from the international crisis.

In fact they have no conception at all of this crisis. They note the movement of the Negro people but they cannot objectively root this movement in the deepening capitalist crisis.

And thus they are forced to see this movement as the result of the Negro's 'special oppression' just as the SWP sees this movement as a result of the Negro's 'national oppression'.

But, as we have seen, the Negro struggle is very much a part of the international crisis which produced the May-June revolutionary events in France as well as reactionary nationalism in Scotland, Canada, etc. The international crisis is not only the fundamental cause of the basic movement of the Negro people but offers the solution to the Negro people's plight through the international struggle of the working people as a whole.

## 7

# PROGRAM TO ERADICATE RACISM

WHAT THEN is the special character in the Negro question, and how is this character to find programmatic expression in the programme of the Marxist Party, in its press, in its daily work in the unions and on the campuses?

Here we confront the same kind of problem as Lenin did over the national question. The existence of racism cannot be wished away by thinking that class demands alone will take care of it.

At the same time if we overstep by even a little the strictly democratic content of the Negro struggle we end up in the end giving everything away to bourgeois nationalism, weakening the working class and the Negro people in the process.

This is what Progressive Labour ends up doing.

There is a democratic content in the Negro movement, a content which must be incorporated into the programme of the working class, which is essential to bring about the unity of the

class, and which can only be realized through the triumph of socialism; for the bourgeoisie is no longer capable of realizing any democratic demand.

That content flows from the existence of racial discrimination in the United States, that is from the racial not the national character of the Negro people.

It is this racial discrimination which is the reason why Negroes share disproportionately in low-paid jobs, promotions, unemployment, poor housing, etc.

The Negro is exploited as a worker and discriminated against as a Negro. It is this combination of class and race factors which account for his 'special position'.

Our programme for a solution to the democratic aspect of the Negro question is the programme of equality.

There can be no compromise on this question.

Any and every manifestation of discrimination because of race

must be eradicated from the working-class movement first of all and then from society as a whole.

### Struggle for socialism

While this programme is a democratic one—that is a programme which should have been accomplished by the bourgeois revolution, even a 'liberal' one in that same sense—it is today a revolutionary programme for only through the struggle for socialism can it be achieved.

To seek to give this programme any more content than this is to lead the Negro to a separatist defeat. To give in at all to white chauvinism on this question will also lead the working class as a whole to defeat.

The revolutionary movement must be the most militant uncompromising fighter against every and all forms of racism and in support of every and all



demands for the removal of racial restrictions no matter how subtly put forward. This means, of course, a head-on collision in the unions with the labour bureaucracy which caters to white chauvinism.

At the same time this poses the form through which this content must be expressed.

Precisely because this essential democratic demand, a demand which affects all classes of Negroes, can only be realized through the struggle for socialism, the demand must find expression as an essential part of the general transitional socialist programme.

The fight for this programme requires the organization of the workers on a class, not a racial basis.

This means the revolutionary party must be the party of all workers, regardless of race, and caucuses and other organizational forms thrown up to struggle around the programme of the party must likewise organize workers as workers not as a race.

This is why black caucuses are

wrong in the unions and why caucuses like DRUM in Detroit have had a tendency to take up bourgeois-nationalist slogans, to express deep hostility toward fellow white workers, and through the black nationalists come closer to the bourgeoisie.

Separate black unions, the next step in the black-nationalist programme, we can be assured, are even more reactionary. We will give such groups no quarter whatsoever.

Is this then the totality of our programme for the Negro worker? Certainly not.

The struggle for equality is the programmatic demand which affects the Negro workers as Negroes but it is their class position which is most critical.

But at this point our programme becomes a programme for all workers regardless of race.

It is a fighting programme of transitional demands which absolutely refuses to accept the existence of capitalism as 'given', as a 'limit' upon the needs of the working people of this country and of all countries.

To the bosses' plans of job

cuts and unemployment we answer with the fighting demand of 'No Job Cuts' in any industry and a shorter work week so that the working class benefits from automation.

To the bosses' programme to rob our wages through inflation we demand escalator clauses so that wages rise as prices rise.

We fight each and every law aimed at restricting the rights of the labour movement and fight at every point not only to defend the unions but to make them effective instruments of class struggle on behalf of all workers by dumping the bureaucratic stooges of the bosses that dominate the unions.

## Nationalization

If the bosses answer that our demands will endanger the dollar or bankrupt particular companies and industries, we reply that we will run the industries in the interests of the working people and under the control of the working people.

There can no longer be any substantial progress in jobs, liv-

The revolutionary party must be the most militant uncompromising fighter against all forms of racism—fighting against the labour bureaucracy and their white chauvinism and any attempt to set up separate 'black unions'.





ing conditions, housing, schools for the Negro worker or the white worker.

We do not beg for reforms from the bosses and the bosses' government but propose instead that the working people take over the government and administer industry in their own interests.

To accomplish this we fight for a labour party as the first great step toward workers' power.

Such a party must fight aggressively, uncompromisingly, absolutely against any and all forms of discrimination in the United States coupled with a socialist programme which reflects the interests of all workers.

Such a party must unite not only all workers in the United States regardless of colour into one mighty class army but become part of a world class movement to eradicate capitalism and imperialist domination from the face of this earth.

The SWP with its theory of the Negro as a nation has openly sold out everything to black nationalism and through black nationalism to the bourgeoisie.

Progressive Labour through its 'special oppression' formula has ended up doing the same thing but with more of a 'radical' cover.

Both groups show through their position on this question

they have no understanding of the international crisis of capitalism, of Marxist theory and method, and essentially accept the capitalist reality as given, not as something which can be overthrown through proletarian struggle.

'Bourgeois nationalism and proletarian internationalism' — these are the two irreconcilably hostile slogans that correspond to the two great class camps throughout the capitalist world, and express the two policies (say, the two world outlooks) in the national question. . . . There are two nations in every modern nation. . . .

This was Lenin's policy. This is our policy.

## 8

# TROTSKY AND NATIONALISM

BLACK nationalism not only divides the working class but at the same time limits the working class to a reform struggle tying it to the bosses. It has been through adaptation to these nationalist trends internationally that the revisionists like the Socialist Workers' Party and Progressive Labour find a road to collaboration with their own bourgeoisie and to reformism. It is this aspect of the relation of black nationalism and revisionism which we will discuss in this part of the series.

We will begin with Joseph Hansen's article 'The Healyites Begin to Unravel Their "Trotskyism"' which appeared in the February 24, 1969 issue of *Intercontinental Press*, international organ of the Socialist Workers' Party and its allies.

The article was written in answer to an article by Lucy St. John, 'The Negro, Nation and Marxist Theory' which appeared in the December 16, 1968 *Bulletin*. St. John's article dealt extensively with Lenin's struggle against the theory of 'cultural-national autonomy', explaining how black nationalism is essentially such a 'cultural-nationalist' trend.

## IGNORE

Hansen chooses to ignore this aspect of the article, concen-

trating on the short section which criticizes Trotsky's position on the Negro question formulated during a discussion with SWP members in 1939.

It is significant that no one in the SWP in the whole past period has referred to Lenin's struggle against the Jewish Bund and Otto Bauer for distorting the national question through support to 'autonomy' of national groupings, including such demands as control of the school system and cultural activities.

It is as if this whole struggle had never taken place, as if Lenin's position was simply that nationalism is abstractly and under all conditions 'progressive'.

In the course of this struggle Lenin made his position absolutely clear, so clear that the only way the SWP and Hansen can deal with it is to ignore it completely.

'All advocacy of the segregation of the workers of one nation from those of another, all attacks upon Marxist "assimilation" or attempts where the proletariat is concerned to contrapose one national culture is bourgeois nationalism, against which it is essential to wage a ruthless struggle. . . . Marxists emphatically condemn so-called cultural-national autonomy, i.e. the idea that educational affairs should be taken out of the hands of the state and transferred to

the respective nationalities.'

This was Lenin's position. It stands in absolute opposition to the position and policies of the Socialist Workers' Party.

Hansen chooses to skip over this section of St. John's article in order to concentrate on the criticisms of Trotsky.

The questions posed by the Trotsky discussions in 1939 (See: 'Leon Trotsky on Black Nationalism and Self-Determination', Merit Publishers, 1967) are whether Trotsky's position is consistent with the position evolved by Lenin and Trotsky in the past on this question, how it fits in with other work by Trotsky in the same period, particularly the Transitional Programme and the labour party question, and to what extent it reflects a concrete analysis of the American Negro within the context of the development of American and world capitalism.

But first this discussion must be placed within its historical context of the living process going on in that period between Trotsky and the SWP.

The discussion occurred in the midst of Trotsky's struggle for the Fourth International. With his arrival in Mexico in 1937 Trotsky was able to develop a very close political relationship with the SWP and this relationship was central to all the pre-



paratory work for the Founding Conference of the Fourth International in 1938 and Trotsky's work up to his death to prepare the Fourth International to carry on without him.

This work took the form of increased correspondence with the SWP leaders and many members, a series of discussions with delegations of SWP leaders and his political intervention in the fundamental dispute which broke out within the SWP in 1940 between the Burnham-Abern-Schachtman group and the Cannon majority.

Of the discussions held in Mexico, three have since been published: the labour party discussion ('Leon Trotsky on the Labour Party', Bulletin Publications, 1968), the Negro discussion, and the discussion on Stalinism (included in 'The Struggle for Marxism in the United States' by Tim Wohlforth, Bulletin Publications, 1968, or 'Stalinism and Trotskyism in the USA', New Park, 1967).

## CONTEXT

It is therefore necessary to understand the Negro discussion within the context of these other discussions, the Transitional Programme and the Schachtman-Cannon fight (See: 'In Defence of Marxism', New Park).

St. John in her article seeks to do this, stating that:

'Trotsky at the time was concerned primarily with turning the SWP around and forcing it to take up the struggle for the Negro people which they had literally ignored.'

That is, she points out that the discussion was part of a whole process in which Trotsky sought to force the SWP to grapple with its theoretical weaknesses.

Hansen is extremely sensitive to this point. He rushes in to assure his SWP readers that while Trotsky was making criticisms of the SWP, these criticisms were really aimed at the 'petty-bourgeois youth who had recently been won away from the social democracy' and who formed the social base of the Schachtman tendency. He then seeks to identify this opposition with the Workers' League since both the Schachtman group and the Workers' League seek to 'correct' Trotsky.

The reader is thus to conclude that while there were some problems within the SWP in the 1930s these problems centred solely on this petty-bourgeois opposition and that once the present leadership of the SWP took care of this opposition all was sweetness, light, health.

In other words, Hansen brings up this point precisely to reassure the SWP youth that the present leadership of the SWP was never criticized by Trotsky but in actuality is the chosen heir of Trotsky and further that anyone who criticizes this leadership must of necessity be just like Schachtman and Burnham.

## CRITICAL

However, a look at the actual Negro discussion reveals that Trotsky was critical not just of the petty-bourgeois section of the party, but the trade union section as well, the section of the party upon which Cannon, Dobbs and Hansen based themselves.

'The characteristic thing about the American workers' parties, trade union organizations, and so on, was their aristocratic character,' Trotsky states. 'It is the basis for opportunism. The skilled workers who feel set in the capitalist society help the bourgeois class to hold the Negroes and the unskilled workers down to a very low scale. Our party is not safe from degeneration if it remains a place for intellectuals, semi-intellectuals, skilled workers and Jewish workers who build a very close milieu which is almost isolated from the genuine masses. Under these conditions our party cannot develop—it will degenerate.'

And again: 'The old organizations, beginning with the AFL, are the organizations of the workers' aristocracy. Our party is part of the same milieu, not of the basic exploited masses of whom the Negroes are the most exploited.'

So it is clear Trotsky had in mind not only that section of the SWP which was to form the Schachtman petty-bourgeois opposition in a year, but also the worker section of the party as well.

But if this is not sufficiently clear, all we have to do is turn to the 1940 discussion which took place after the Schachtman split where Trotsky returns to the

same point.

Hansen himself was a participant in that discussion. In fact it was Hansen who asked Trotsky the following question:

## ADAPTATION

'Yesterday Comrade Trotsky made some remarks about our adaptation to the so-called progressives in the trade unions, he mentioned the line of the north-west organizer and also our attitude in connection with the elections, and the Stalinists. I wish to point out that this is not something completely new on Comrade Trotsky's part. More than two years ago during the discussion over the Transitional Programme he discussed exactly these same points and had exactly the same position, with due regard for the difference in time and that then it was not the elections but the farmer-labour party that was to the fore. Comrade Trotsky has also written some letters regarding the Stalinists and the need for a more positive line toward them. In the past faction fight too, Comrade Trotsky mentioned in his polemic "From a Scratch to the Danger of Gangrene" the following point, which he underlined: "More than once the party will have to remind its own trade unionists that a pedagogical adaptation to the more backward layers of the proletariat must not become transformed into a political adaptation to the conservative bureaucracy of the trade unions". I am wondering if Comrade Trotsky considers that our party is displaying a conservative tendency in the sense that we are adapting ourselves politically to the trade unions' bureaucracy.'

Trotsky answers: 'To a certain degree I believe so.'

Why is it that Hansen makes a special point of distorting this whole aspect of the relation between Trotsky and the SWP in this period and in fact gratuitously attacks our own history of this period as 'gamey'? ('The Struggle for Marxism in the United States' by Tim Wohlforth.)

It can only be that a growing number of SWP members are beginning to ask questions about the history of the SWP and that such questions would endanger the present leadership of the Party which surrounds itself with a cult of historical orthodoxy.





LEON TROTSKY, after his arrival in Mexico in 1937, involved himself to the full in the struggle for Marxism in the United States. Hansen attempts to show that this struggle was solely directed against the petty-bourgeois opposition of Schachtman and Burnham while in reality Trotsky was also critical of the trade union section on which Cannon, Dobbs and Hansen based themselves.

Such an investigation would reveal that while Trotsky was seeking through the Negro discussions and other forms of intervention to prevent the opportunist degeneration of the SWP as a whole, including that section upon which the present leadership rested, the current SWP leadership is turning to this discussion to excuse precisely the end product of this degeneration—the current opportunist policies of the SWP.

What precisely was the position which Trotsky held in the 1939 discussion—'Black Control of Black Communities', uncritical support to petty-bourgeois black nationalist trends? Not at all.

## SELF-DETERMINATION

What he proposed was that the SWP make clear that the Negroes have the right to self-

determination. He did not hold that the Negroes were a nation, but he held open the possibility that they may become a nation, particularly under conditions of fascism in America.

And if they were to become a nation the revolutionary party must uphold their right to 'black control of black communities' or 'cultural autonomy'? No, not at all. We must uphold only their right to 'set up a state'.

On this Trotsky stood on the same grounds as Lenin. To him the right to self determination had only one concrete meaning—the right to secede and establish a 'black state which could enter into a federation'.

While there is much confusion and contradictory statement in this discussion, there is nothing in them to justify the present SWP policy of adaptation to black-nationalist cultural demands.

Our central difference with Trotsky is that the question of whether or not the Negro can become a nation which could then secede to form a state can only be determined through a serious concrete analysis of the actual development of the Negro people within American capitalism.

## EMPIRICISM

This, rather than being 'vulgar empiricism' (oh how Hansen loves to accuse his opponents of the very method he lives by, is the Marxist method.

Marxism is most fundamentally an historical method which seeks to place questions within a concrete context of historical development. It has nothing in common with a metaphysical method of abstract notions which are imposed here and there and



everywhere arbitrarily without consideration of time, place, concrete development.

It is precisely the worshippers of the 'concrete', like Hansen, who transform their theories into empty formulae to justify their crass capitulation to immediate opportunities.

What little such concrete analysis that took place during this discussion was incorrect and deeply influenced by the Communist Party Black Belt notions.

For instance the one participant who goes into this question, a certain 'Carlos', states:

'It seems to me that the so-called "black belt" is a super-exploited section of the American economy. It has all the characteristics of a subjugated section of an empire'. He then notes the tendency of migration out of the black belt, but asserts that this tendency 'can no longer operate'.

As we have discussed in an earlier article, the so-called black belt has continued to disappear under the impact of the agricultural revolution, removing with it whatever objective basis ever

existed for nationhood for Negroes.

Today this is reflected even in the ideology of the black nationalists who do not raise this demand of statehood. Thus we are faced with a contradictory situation under which precisely at a time when the objective basis for nationalism is completely eroded, we witness a fantastic growth of subjective nationalist sentiment.

## SEPARATENESS

This is not the first time such a development has occurred. So it was with the Jew who responded to the decay caused by the capitalist revolution of any objective basis for his separateness with a growth of Zionism.

Marxists saw this development as a sign of the growing internal contradictions of capitalism and the solution to the Jewish question not in Zionism and separatism but through the socialist revolution. And this is precisely the way we approach the Negro question.

It is our position that Trotsky was wrong in proposing the pos-

sibility of the Negro becoming a nation.

This error was rooted in the lack of a concrete analysis of the position of the Negro in the development of American capitalism.

The further development of the Negro since 1939, rather than confirming his prediction, has done quite the opposite so that the growth of black-nationalist ideology today has less objective roots in the real position of the Negro than it would have in the 1930s.

Finally, if the Negro had become or could become a nation it would in no way mean the kind of adaptation to black nationalism the SWP presently peddles.

This is the full extent of our lack of 'orthodoxy'. We never claimed to be 'orthodox' Trotskyists anyway, for orthodoxy in all forms is anti-theoretical to the Marxist method which is based on the development of theory, not on mere repetition of past positions. All we claim to be is Trotskyist and that the SWP is not.

# 9

## THE TRANSITIONAL PROGRAMME

HANSEN proceeds in his own way to seek to place Trotsky's Negro discussion within the context of the discussions and political positions evolved in the same period—in particular the Transitional Programme and the labour party demand.

What he actually does is to describe the method he uses on the Negro question and for that matter all questions, and then attributes this method to Trotsky, finding it expressed in the Transitional Programme and in the labour party demand:

'What is this method, the method that has made the Transitional Programme of such extraordinary importance in the world Trotskyist movement? It is to continually try to find bridges between the programme of revolutionary socialism and whatever the current level of political understanding of the oppressed and exploited masses may be.'

And further on, he explains

this 'method' of his in more detail:

'Trotsky's approach on the tactical level is precisely to determine the current subjective and psychological level of the masses and try to meet that level by raising slogans that objectively (because they correspond to the objective needs of the masses) lead them toward socialism, the only system that can actually satisfy their needs. The party avoids opportunism by advancing slogans that correspond with its programmes—they can be realized only under socialism. It avoids sectarianism by breaking them into transitional steps that gear into the current subjective and psychological level of the masses.'

While this may superficially sound like a description of the method of the Transitional Programme it is in actuality quite the opposite.

As Hansen sees it, one starts with the 'current subjective and

psychological level of the masses', then you search your collection of programmatic demands, properly broken up into 'transitional steps', for particular demands which 'gear into' this present level of consciousness of the class.

If one were to read even the title of the Transitional Programme 'The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International', one would immediately see that Trotsky proceeded in an exactly opposite way.

Trotsky thus begins objectively with an assessment of the stage through which capitalism is proceeding, then works out a programme of demands to overcome 'the contradiction between the maturity of the objective revolutionary conditions and the immaturity of the proletariat and its vanguard'.

Hansen begins subjectively with the current surface mood and movement in the class and



seeks to work out various programmatic 'steps' which adapt to this current mood and movement.

## OBJECTIVE

With Trotsky programme always flows from an objective analysis of capitalism, and considerations of subjective moods, important though it is, is subordinate to this.

This point can be further clarified if we also look at what Hansen says about the labour party demand.

'There was considerable empirical justification for that slogan,' Hansen tells us, 'owing to the widespread sentiment in those years among the militants in the American labour movement who favoured breaking with the Democratic machine and organizing its own party.'

This consistently flows from Hansen's method of seeing 'where the action is' and then 'gearing in' some 'steps'.

It so happens that Trotsky proceeded in quite a different way on this very question. During his discussions of the

labour party with Schachtman, Cannon and Dunne complete confusion broke out as to exactly what were the subjective sentiments of the masses. Was there a sizeable labour party sentiment or not?

Trotsky intervened at this point:

'I cannot judge whether sentiment for a labour party exists or not because I have no personal observations or impressions, but I do not find it decisive as to what degree the leaders of trade unions or the rank and file are ready or inclined to build a political party. It is very difficult to establish objective information. We have no machine to take a referendum. We can measure the mood only by action if the slogan is put on the agenda. But what we can say is that the objective situation is absolutely decisive. . . . The problem is not the mood of the masses, but the objective situation, and our job is to confront the backward material of the masses with the tasks which are determined by objective facts and not by psychology. . . . We claim to have Marxism or scientific socialism. What does "scientific socialism" signify in reality? It signifies that the party which represents this social science, departs, as every science, not from subjective wishes, tendencies or moods, but from objective facts, from the material situation of the different classes and their relationships.'

So much for Hansen's attempt to transform Trotsky into, if not a God, then perhaps the world's finest empiricist!

Hansen then proceeds to give us a concrete example of this method of his in practice:

'Indeed, Trotsky's proposal for a labour party based on the unions in the United States, which is endorsed by Healy's followers, is symmetrical with the idea put forward by the Socialist Workers' Party for an independent black political party, which they condemn. The grounds for both political proposals are similar. They would provide a vehicle to detach the workers in one case and the Afro-Americans in

the other from subservience to the capitalist parties and to promote their mobilization for struggle in their own interests.'

Hansen then goes on to explain how such a black political party would 'shatter' the existing two-party system much, we expect, the way the formation of a Paisleyite party and a civil rights party in Ulster has shattered the two-party system and one party rule there.

## INDEPENDENT

If a slogan is to be justified by widespread sentiment for it, then, of course, present SWP policy would make sense—today push an independent black party and perhaps tomorrow a labour party.

But if political demands flow from objective class consideration and not subjective mood, one proceeds in a quite different manner. If there is in reality a crisis in world capitalism which is compelling the capitalists to carry on a deepened class struggle against the American workers as well as workers all over the world, then the objective conditions are being established for the development of a revolutionary struggle of the American workers for power.

However, the American working class, even more than workers in other countries, is extremely 'immature' in its consciousness and organization. Above all, it maintains an open political bloc with the capitalists in the form of the Democratic Party.

What is required above all is to drive a wedge between the ruling class and the working class politically. That wedge is the labour party demand and it is only the revolutionary party which will do the driving.

Thus the objective situation requires a struggle today for the labour party demand, even though this demand has not arisen spontaneously among wide sections of the class.

But how about the demand for the 'independent black political



JOSEPH HANSEN, leading member of the Socialist Workers' Party, attempts to elevate the reactionary demand for a black political party to that of a transitional demand.



party? What kind of wedge will this drive through class relations in the United States?

It will drive precisely a race wedge as such a party will organize all blacks regardless of class against all whites regardless of class. It will thus tie the black workers to the black petty bourgeoisie and through this strata to capitalism itself.

Thus the objective impact of the creation of such a party will not be symmetrical but oppositional to the creation of a class party of all workers.

This means that even though there is more sentiment today for an independent black party than for an independent class party, we must struggle against the formation of the former and for

the formation of the latter.

To accept the current level of consciousness of the class as a 'given' and then work out some way to relate to it is crass empiricism and opportunism of the worst sort. Revolutionists have got to be able to fight bourgeois methods of thought within the working class—racism, black nationalism, anti-communism, religion, reformism, syndicalism, etc.—precisely in order to bridge the gap between the objective conditions the class faces, which requires a socialist solution, and the low level of consciousness of this task within the working class.

This cannot be done through a series of separated 'steps' as Hansen proposes in true evolutionary

Menshevik fashion. It requires instead the linking together of a system of transitional demands which, rather than capitulating to today's conditions and tasks, must be seen as stemming 'from today's conditions and from today's consciousness of wide layers of the working class and unalterably leading to one final conclusion: the conquest of power'.

Hansen breaks the links and thus transforms transitional demands into a reformist adaptation to bourgeois consciousness within the working class.

Thus we see how the SWP's support of black nationalism is intimately linked to an opportunist espousal of reformism, to a commitment to the bourgeoisie and not socialist revolution.

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## ON REFORM OR REVOLUTION

MORE CLARITY can be achieved at this point if we now turn to George Breitman's article

'Is It Wrong For Revolutionaries To Fight For Reforms?' which appeared in the February 28,

1969, 'Militant'.

The most remarkable thing about this article is that Breitman manages to fill two pages of the 'Militant' discussing the relation of reform and revolution without once discussing the Transitional Programme.

While Hansen takes the Transitional Programme and transforms it into a reformist programme Breitman, more honestly, dispenses with it altogether.

'The essence of Marxist strategy, or any revolutionary strategy in our time,' Breitman informs us, 'is to combine the struggle for reforms with the struggle for revolution.'

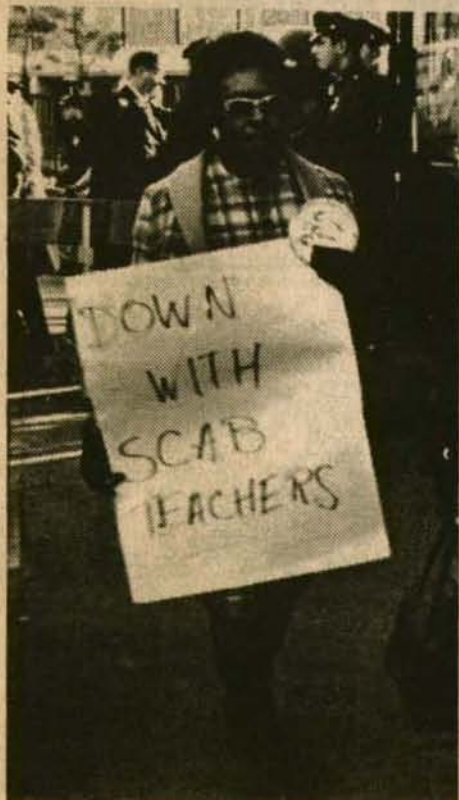
This is to be done by fighting for reforms 'in a revolutionary way'—by militant mass action rather than polite testimony, and as part of a strategy consciously aimed at mobilizing the masses to change the system'.

This militant reformism is all revolutionaries can do today because:

'The United States is not now in a revolutionary situation.'

True, there is a lot of 'social unrest', but this social unrest, it seems, has no objective cause.

Trotsky proceeded on this question very differently and thus came up with quite the opposite position than Breitman's militant reformism.



The slogan for the right of self-determination can in no way be confused with the reactionary ideology of 'ghettoism', 'cultural autonomy' or 'community control'.



He began, as we have noted, with an assessment of capitalism as a **world historical system** not, as does Breitman, with a superficial assessment of the situation in the United States. The situation in the United States and the strategy to be followed there, flowed, for Trotsky, out of this world perspective.

Trotsky saw this world system in its 'Death Agony' and on the basis of this assessment he developed a **revolutionary**, not militant reformist, programme for the world working class, not just the workers in a single country.

The relevance of this programme, which Hansen sees as having 'extraordinary importance', stands or falls on this objective assessment of world capitalism.

If capitalism is capable of continuing to seriously develop then demands such as the 30-hour week or for wages to rise as prices rise, etc., can definitely be 'co-opted' and other demands for workers' defence guards, soviets, etc., are unnecessary.

This is where Mandel's theory of 'neo-capitalism' fits in. This Belgian theoretician for the SWP claims that capitalism has superseded the period of imperialist decay upon which the whole Transitional Programme rests.

We, however, do not subscribe to this notion. We hold that world capitalism was only able to postpone its crisis during the boom period of the 1950s and has now entered a period of stagnation and crisis in which the capitalists must seek to upset the political equilibrium between classes established in the 1950s in order to re-establish economic equilibrium.

It is this fundamental fact which lies behind the revolutionary explosion last May-June in France.

American development cannot be abstracted out of this international revolutionary situation. The 'social unrest', which Breitman notes, is but a mild reflection of the convulsions to develop in this country as the great imperialist powers of Europe and America struggle with each other and their own working class to resolve their economic crisis.

While it is true that the revolutionary situation is more advanced in Europe, it is equally true that because of the present interdependence of American and European capital, revolutionary developments in Europe are and

will continue to forcefully upset the political equilibrium in the United States.

So the Transitional Programme is not only relevant but has burning importance to the struggles of American workers now.

## REVOLUTIONARY

To assert that we are in a revolutionary period internationally and that because of this the Transitional Programme has the greatest relevance to the struggles of American workers does not mean that a revolution is about to occur momentarily in the United States. As Trotsky wrote in the 'Third International After Lenin':

'The revolutionary character of the epoch does not lie in that it permits of the accomplishment of the revolution, that is, the seizure of power at every given moment. Its revolutionary character consists in profound and sharp fluctuations . . . which 'raise the question of power.'

Under these objective circumstances, what then is the relation of 'minimum' or reform demands to the revolutionary programme? Does it mean we discard these demands? This is what the Transitional Programme has to say on this question:

'The Fourth International does not discard the programme of the old "minimum" demands to the degree to which these have preserved at least part of their vital forcefulness. Indefatigably, it defends the democratic rights and social conquests of the workers. But it carries on this day-to-day fight within the framework of the correct actual, that is, revolutionary perspective. Insofar as the old, partial, "minimal" demands of the masses clash with the destructive and degrading tendencies of decadent capitalism—and this occurs at each step—the Fourth International advances a system of transitional demands, the essence of which is contained in the fact that ever more openly and decisively they will be directed against the very bases of the bourgeois regime. The old "minimal programme" is superseded by the transitional programme, the task of which lies in systematic mobilization of the masses for the proletarian revolution.'

This makes clear what this whole point about the 'co-optability' of particular demands is all about. Breitman, proceeding from his superficial statement that 'the

United States is not now in a revolutionary situation', concludes that almost any demand today is co-optable, but we should fight for these demands anyway, militantly, 'in a revolutionary way.'

But if one proceeds from a real understanding of the capitalist crisis, then a whole series of demands, which may appear on the surfaces to be minimal and co-optable, are in actuality transitional—that is, to implement them requires an overthrow of capitalist society.

Throughout the 1950s the trade union movement struggled essentially to achieve three bread-and-butter goals—pay increases for the membership to keep up with rising prices and productivity, decent working conditions and job security.

We now have entered into a period where the struggle around these three questions poses the destruction of capitalism itself and thus what are required are transitional slogans related to each need of class, linked with the political struggle for power.

Thus, while in the 1950s some sort of escalator clause was granted in basic industry and wages tended to rise, today in the last settlements in auto and steel escalator clauses were dropped and wages fell below the rising cost of living not to mention productivity increases.

## PROFITABILITY

The battle for anything beyond this threatens the profitability of these firms and thus threatens capitalism itself. This is why the trade union bureaucrats sold out in these contracts.

The same holds for working conditions which have been eroded fantastically with the speed-up in basic industry. As far as job security goes whole industries like mining, longshore, railroads are being largely liquidated while huge cuts are taking place and more are in store in auto and steel.

While this process has been going on for some time, now it takes place within a context of plans to slow industrial growth to tackle inflation which will lead to both structural and conjunctural unemployment. So the demand for job security takes on a non-co-optable transitional character.

This is what makes the de-



mands of the Transitional Programme for a 'Sliding Scale of Wages' (escalator clause), '30 for 40' and 'Workers' Control of Production' so pertinent and revolutionary in this period. This is why these demands must be linked with the political struggle for power—that is, we must fight not only for these demands but for a consciousness in the working class that these demands can only be realized if the workers come to power.

This is why the Workers' League fights in industry for these transitional demands linked at all times to the struggle for an American labour party.

A central demand of such a labour party will be nationalization of industry under workers' control. This demand will make clear that only by workers as a class politically struggling to take over industry themselves can their working and living conditions be protected.

Other demands from the Transitional Programme, such as defence guards to protect workers from attacks by the state and fascist thugs, and finally workers' councils, can and must be raised in a living way as the struggle intensifies.

We see concretely how the Transitional Programme 'supercedes' the old minimum programme and combines the struggle for the defence of the working class with the offensive struggle for power.

This is why the approach of the Transitional Programme has nothing in common with Breitman's social-democratic preaching of 'revolution' later and reforms militantly fought for now.

## THREATENED

We do not, however exclude a concession here and there even on these demands. If the capitalists feel their very rule is threatened then they may be willing to give today something to temporarily re-establish political equilibrium only in order to be able to take it back on the morrow. This is the great lesson of the French events. This is why a revolutionary leadership which fights at all times for political power is so essential.

There are of course some demands which are completely co-optable by capitalism despite its crisis.

Whether fought for militantly

or politely such demands do not move the working class towards the struggle for power but rather tie the workers ever closer to their oppressors. These demands essentially come under the heading of 'structural reforms'.

They propose changes in the way capitalism and its administration is structured without raising any demands which interfere with the capitalists' battle to re-establish economic equilibrium at the expense of the working class.

Such a demand is the SWP's pet slogan 'Black Control of the Black Community'. Nothing is posed in the way of demands for the destruction of slum housing in the ghettos, or rotten schooling, or jobs for black workers. The slogan only proposes that the blacks separate themselves from the whites and administer their own oppression.

Such a 'reform' changes nothing essential to capitalist survival and in fact contributes to that survival by isolating the black workers from the rest of the working class and bringing them closer to the bourgeoisie.

Such a demand is in the natural programme of an 'independent black party' and such a party is the appropriate political form for advancing such a programme.

The Transitional Programme is likewise the natural and necessary programme for the labour party and the labour party is the appropriate political form for advancing this programme under present conditions.

The demand 'Black Control of Black Communities' and all similar demands are reforms which are not only anti-thetical to the Transitional Programme, but for that very reason keep the working class on a reform, that is bourgeois, level.

There are, however, legitimate democratic demands of the Negro people that can and must be linked with the Transitional Programme of the working class.

## DISCRIMINATION

These are demands to wipe out every and all forms of discrimination on all levels of American society and to actively combat racism. Such democratic demands, as we have noted earlier, cannot be achieved under conditions of capitalist decay. Thus only through the struggle for socialism can they be realized.

There are, of course, many demands — democratic ones, minor trade union issues—which Marxists actively support.

But what differentiates the Marxists from the reformists is not simply the 'militancy' with which we fight for this or that partial demand, but rather that such demands are integrated into a revolutionary strategy, the centre of which is the political struggle for transitional demands.

George Breitman's open espousal of reformism has a history to it for Breitman has played a very important role in the political degeneration of the SWP.

This history will help us see how closely linked the position of the SWP on the black question is to the general evolution of not only the SWP, but its international co-thinkers towards open reformism.

Breitman is the author of the 1957 SWP resolution on the Negro question 'The Class Struggle Road to Negro Equality'. How the SWP evolved from this resolution to the YSA resolution passed this fall 'On the Revolutionary Struggle of Black America for Self-Determination', is an example of their method in action.

The 1957 resolution was written in the wake of the Montgomery bus boycott when the Negro struggle centred on a civil rights battle in the South.

Just as the SWP today adapts to the black nationalists, so then they adapted to Martin Luther King's movement.

The Montgomery bus boycott was described as 'skillfully mobilized by able leaders with clear aims . . . and with a 'broadly representative leading cadre'.

Even King's Southern Leadership Conference was hailed because it purportedly 'opens new possibilities for the development of mass struggle methods on a broader basis'.

While the resolution held open the 'theoretical' possibility of a nationalist future development of the Negro struggle under which conditions the SWP would put forward the slogan of self-determination, it emphasized that 'even under these circumstances socialists would continue to advocate integration rather than separation as the best solution to the race questions for Negro and white workers alike'.

It was precisely in this period that Breitman originally formu-



lated this position of fighting for reforms in a 'militant way'.

But the lesson of the entire King and SNCC stage of the Negro struggle was that despite the greatest militancy this movement was unable to change in any real way either the class oppression of the Negro workers or the racism they face.

The lesson was precisely the failure of militancy alone as long as such militancy is entrapped in a reformist programme rather than revolutionary strategy based on the Transitional Programme.

## FEDERAL TROOPS

Flowing from this reformist perspective Breitman's next contribution to the development of the SWP's political programme was the advocacy of sending Federal troops to the South to enforce school desegregation.

It was only shortly after the SWP adopted this position that Federal troops were used—in Detroit to shoot down black rebels in the uprising there. This is truly an example of a 'co-optable demand'!

But this position, which the SWP has quietly shelved for the moment, shows the actual logic of reformism—to turn the masses towards reliance on the very capitalist state which oppresses them.

Rather than raising transitional demands, such as defence guards for the Negro people, the SWP urged the Negro people to look to the capitalist state for 'protection'.

That the SWP in 1957 advocated integration and in 1968 advocates separatism, while inconsistent on the surface of it, has a class logic to it.

In both cases the SWP was proceeding pragmatically—that is it was assessing the 'current subjective and psychological level of the masses', and choosing some 'transitional steps' that 'gear' into this level.

Or, in simpler terms, it was finding out where the action is and digging up a demand or two which allowed it to adapt to that action.

At no point was the SWP capable of putting forward the leadership of the revolutionary party based on a revolutionary strategy and an integrated transitional programme. Thus at heart both its adaptation to the integration movement and to the

black nationalist movement represented a desertion of the struggle for the revolutionary party.

Just as the only way a revolutionary perspective for the United States can be developed is through an understanding of international perspectives, so too the desertion of the struggle for the revolutionary party by the SWP has its roots in its desertion of an international perspective and its international break with the Trotskyist movement.

Here, too, Breitman played a special role. In 1952-1953 the SWP was embroiled in an internal factional battle with a tendency led by Bert Cochran.

This tendency received support internationally from Michel Pablo, at that time head of the Fourth International. In reaction to this Cannon carried through an empirical split internationally with Pablo, forming the International Committee of the Fourth International together with what are now the British and French co-thinkers of the Workers' League.

At this time Cannon issued an 'Open Letter' which stated:

To sum up: The lines of cleavage between Pablo's revisionism and orthodox Trotskyism are so deep that no compromise is possible either politically or organizationally.

Some in the SWP did not see it quite that way. At the very same time as Cannon was issuing this letter, Breitman was in correspondence with Ernest German—Mandel of the Pablo group.

'My dear Ernest,' wrote Breitman, despite the cleavage.

Cannon called him to order and the tone of the letters stiffened. But Breitman, as well as George Novack, who was equally upset with the break, just pulled in their horns and waited for a more propitious moment.

They did not have to wait long. In 1961 it was Cannon who was writing 'My dear Ernest' letters and by 1964 it was the tendency which became the Workers' League which was expelled for fighting for the position that Pabloism was revisionism.

At the very heart of the break with Pablo was the development of a revisionist tendency internationally which no longer saw any place for the struggle for the party around the Transitional Programme.

Hypnotized by what they called the 'new world reality' they proposed that the Fourth International liquidate itself into the Stalinist movement which would be 'compelled' by this reality to play a 'revolutionary role'. And later the very same method was used in relation to Castro, Ben Bella and now the black nationalists.

Beginning in 1961 the Socialist Labour League, the Organisation Communiste Internationaliste in France and our tendency counterposed to this revisionism a whole analysis of the developing international crisis of capitalism which made the fight for the independent revolutionary party in every country on the basis of the Transitional Programme the very centre of all our work.

The May-June events in 1968 did not catch our movement by surprise. We foresaw them as early as 1961.

That we should end a discussion of the Negro question and nationalism with a discussion of international perspectives, of reform or revolution, of the split with the revisionists, is correct and natural.

It is through tendencies like black nationalism that the revisionists find their way to reformism, to an alliance with their own ruling class.

It is through the international class struggle that the Negro people, under the leadership of the revolutionary party, will find their way to a socialist society which abolishes the exploitation of man by man and throws the barbaric doctrine of racism into the dustbin of history along with everything else which perpetuates man's inhumanity to man.

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